



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

SYMPOSIUM REMARKS

Second Annual Arts on the Agenda Conference — Chicago Public Schools

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

Chicago Cultural Center — April 28, 2009

Thank you, Barbara, for that kind introduction and for welcoming me here today. The arts are on fire!

Congratulations to Xavier Botana and David Roche, Office of Arts Education. David and his group of 10 strong individuals are working hard to put Arts on the Agenda. They are highlighting and focusing attention on the arts and creativity in education. It looks like you have a busy and exciting day ahead of you.

I am thrilled to be here among dedicated instructional leaders who every day effectively serve the children and youth of Chicago. We all know that school administrators are among the very best at creative problem solving. Let's be honest, you have to be in order to do your jobs!

As a former music teacher, drama director, district fine arts coordinator, principal of an elementary creative arts magnet school, and for 10 years the principal of a 2,000-student urban high school, I know the critical value of the arts in education. The arts capture beauty, touch the soul, and inspire the mind to envision new solutions to challenges. The arts are critical to the quality of life for individuals, schools, communities, *and* the workplace.

In Chicago, you have hundreds of partnerships among the schools, community organizations, foundations, artists, and the business community. Your school district offers multiple options for students and families through specialty schools that focus on the arts and arts education in various ways. However, your schools, just as in Wisconsin, are stretched to the limit as you attempt to sustain quality, growth, and a balanced curriculum that serves the needs of all students. The solutions to this reality are complex and long term.

In addition to the critical need for increased funding, it is essential that we continue to reach out to develop new partnerships, and find and align additional resources within the community, business, and government to create cohesive programs. The arts are experiencing reduced access and reduced participation. This is true in both Illinois and Wisconsin.

Yet, when schools schedule music or drama performances or other arts events open to the community, attendance is at an all-time high. We know many parents and community members judge the entire school by its arts program. In fact, these same student performances and exhibitions may be the only time some members of the community enter our schools.

Even though we know our citizens value the arts, we are still faced with the challenge to sustain arts education in the schools. It is a daunting challenge in these economic times, but there are strong voices

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calling for support of the arts in our schools and communities. These voices include growing numbers of people in business and government. They recognize that the knowledge-based, creative economy is here.

Those who know how to think, create, and innovate will have an advantage in developing the high value goods and services that propel economic development. Those skills can be taught in our schools through the broad spectrum of the curriculum.

But for all of us, we have seen the profound effect of the arts. We have seen the responsiveness of very young babies to sound, light, touch, and movement. We have observed preschoolers who are highly motivated to engage in singing, dancing, painting, and playing “make believe.” And research has provided evidence that motivation sustains attention, and that the process of attention is central to every aspect of cognition and school performance. We have seen that motivation, attention, and focus in our students in the arts. We have seen them transfer that motivation, attention, and focus to other academic areas.

My remarks today are intended to help you expand the message of the arts as essential to a balanced and meaningful education. We have a tremendous opportunity to shape a vision for 21st century American education that is transformative, not another “reform” based on shelves of curriculum standards and reams of standardized tests, not to standardize education to an ever greater degree, but to personalize education, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions. Just as when they were little, and they wanted to sing, dance, paint, and play.

I want to share some observations about our education system by Sir Ken Robinson, now a senior policy advisor for education with the J. Paul Getty Trust. I’ve had the pleasure of meeting and serving on panels with Sir Ken Robinson and value his insights and global perspective.

From his extensive work as a consultant throughout the world, he is surprised at the similarity and hierarchy of curriculum and teaching in schools around the globe. The hierarchy almost always looks like this: at the top is mathematics, and then science, and then a bit further down come the humanities, and then come the arts. And in the arts, there is another hierarchy: art and music have a much greater presence than drama or dance or any other art form. At the same time that this hierarchy continues, the world around us is changing dramatically.

In some countries, the real growth area is in the arts, science, and technology. These are areas where creative ideas matter most. For example, Singapore aims to be the creative hub of Southeast Asia and they have in place the Creative Singapore Strategy. In China, a compelling priority in education is to figure out how to educate their people to be creative. Many countries now recognize that the future of their national economy depends upon a steady flow of innovative ideas.

In the United States, we must change STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) into STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, *Arts*, and Mathematics) by adding the arts to the equation. The traditional hierarchy with the arts at the bottom should perhaps be turned upside down, with the arts and creativity at the top.

When you seek to collaborate with community and business leaders, you can begin by discussing what business leaders have told us is needed in the workplace and global economy. When we asked this question at a Wisconsin Business Summit on 21st Century Skills, our business leaders told us they needed creative problem solvers, critical thinkers, people with good interpersonal skills, people who can communicate and articulate important messages to others.

Once again, these are skills and traits that the arts can develop in our students. You can help send an important message to business leaders. Encourage them to look to people who are engaged in the arts, because they will see the abilities needed in today’s creative economy and workforce. In other words, to the extent that you can help provide meaningful experiences in the arts and creativity, you are giving

your students what they need for the new economies in Chicago, in Illinois, throughout our country, and the world: self-confidence, innovation, flexibility, multiple ways to communicate, problem solving, and a clear sense of collaboration and teamwork.

I continue to bring creativity into the equation because it is so very important to our future, including the long and short-term strategies for restoring economic development and prosperity in our nation. Creativity drives innovations in science, business, technology, and even service industries. Entrepreneurs are problem-solvers, innovators by definition, and visionaries when at their best.

Developing the arts and creativity in education programs can be a deliberate workforce development strategy. Once again, this kind of thinking helps to move the arts and creativity from the bottom of the hierarchy to the top.

Early on during our work in Wisconsin with the Task Force on Arts and Creativity in Education, it was clear that we needed a common perspective on what we meant by the arts and what we meant by creativity. As we explored a description of the arts, we realized that over time we have been narrowing the description, perhaps to fit the dwindling resources available. I share this realization with you as a caution so you don't allow the same thing to happen in your schools.

In today's world, the arts must include dance, literary arts, and media arts, including animation, film, video, audio, game creation, and game methodology. They also include music, theater, visual arts and design, including architecture, graphic arts, and industrial design. I'm sure you can add to this description. The point is we have multiple ways to engage students in the arts and creativity. By broadening the definition, we can expand the opportunity.

We have also explored ways to think about and expand creativity in our classrooms, schools, and community. Our task force adopted a model of the creative process described by Sir Ken Robinson. Namely, that the creative process involves three primary components: being imaginative, creative, and innovative.

The first step is imagination, the capacity that we all have to see something in the mind's eye. Creativity is then using that imagination to solve problems; call it applied imagination. It follows that innovation is putting that creativity into practice. So if you have ideas, but don't act on them, you are imaginative, but not creative. Ultimately, learners who exercise creativity combine imagination, creative thought, and innovation to produce something that has value. This combination may very well be a key to future success.

The essential capacities that enable creativity also require content knowledge, skills, and attitudes, plus a learning environment that nurtures imagination, creativity, and innovation. This learning environment and use of teaching strategies that nurture creativity can occur across the curriculum. Creativity can be as much a part of the science or math classroom as any classroom devoted to the arts. At the same time, it is possible to teach the arts, or math, or science in ways that stifle creativity.

As instructional leaders, you can help by focusing professional learning with teachers on developing a classroom environment that nurtures creativity: a place where learners feel safe in taking risks, where there is a sense of community and teamwork, where curiosity is encouraged as an important first step in learning, where there is an openness to diverse perspectives, and where teachers and students are comfortable with more than one right answer. Call it classrooms as cultures of constant inquiry.

Believe me, I know this is hard, under our current accountability systems, which overemphasize once-a-year standardized tests in reading and math. We need on-going performance-based, formative and portfolio assessments in all content areas, which provide immediate feedback to students, teachers, and parents.

We can learn about authentic assessment from quality arts education. It has always been performance- and portfolio-based. The reauthorization of the ESEA must recognize the need for multiple assessments. If we want to have students who think “outside the box,” we must move them beyond “bubbling in the circle” of a standardized test.

As learners, we can all reflect on our own education and the teachers we remember who nurtured an environment where creativity could flourish. Those teachers stand out in our memory. We must ensure that we attract and retain this next generation of creative and innovative educators. We will lose our most creative teachers and principals if they don’t feel the system supports their growth.

There was a time when I was challenged by decision-makers to provide evidence and research that substantiates the importance of the arts in the school curriculum. Over the past 20 years, dedicated people have done the work and produced that research. Among them are scholars from Columbia University, Harvard, Stanford, UCLA, and the University of Connecticut. Reports like *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* or *The Dana Foundation: Learning, Arts and the Brain* are consistent in the results they report.

You have in your packet a Quick Facts Sheet. For instance, children who study the arts are:

- four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement;
- four times more likely to participate in a math or science fair;
- three times more likely to win an award for school attendance; and
- more likely to score 20 points higher than their peers on measures of creative thinking, fluency, originality, and elaboration.

We have wonderful models of arts-infused instruction in schools in Chicago and throughout the nation. The results are quite consistent. Besides learning in the arts, student behavior and school climate are positively affected as measured through increased student engagement, lower absenteeism rates, fewer discipline problems, and increased student achievement.

In spite of these growing collections of strong evidence, we face problems of equity and access in Wisconsin schools, just as you do in Chicago and other parts of Illinois. In Wisconsin, the number of children from families eligible for free or reduced-price breakfasts and lunches continues to climb. And the increase in poverty rates is not just an urban or suburban issue; it is also a rural issue. I am sure the situation is similar here in Illinois.

We all feel the responsibility to ensure that every child, no matter the economic or educational level of their parents, their race, ethnicity, the language they speak at home, or where they happen to live, graduates ready to successfully take on the next chapter of their life. You understand that this is more than an education issue; it is a moral and social justice issue, and it is an economic imperative for our nation.

The equity and access issue can also be raised if we examine the focus of resources when elementary, middle, and high school budgets and staffing are compared. We know that the arts are developmental as much as any other content area. We also know that young children come to the arts very naturally and that their future possibilities for achievement are affected by experiences in early childhood. During your discussions throughout the day, you will want to examine the distribution of resources from kindergarten through high school and reflect on their relationship to what we know about how children learn and the importance of sustained, developmental opportunities in the arts.

So in this brief time with you this morning, I’ve brought out several lenses through which you can frame discussions through the day. You can choose the lens of creativity, 21st century skills, public and private

partnerships, workforce development, a PK-12 developmental program, or equity and access. They each have an identity but are also inter-related. Your challenge is matching messages to the audience. The emphasis on certain aspects of the message may need to be different for parents than for the business community, or your school district leaders.

I understand the Office of Arts Education for Chicago Public Schools was established in 2006. Its goals are bold and visionary. They emphasize equity, opportunity, and increased resources. In my opinion, they can be achieved if approached as a sustained, long-range effort, and there is consensus around the validity of these goals at the local, state, *and federal* level.

In closing, I acknowledge that we are faced with the challenge of preparing young people for a future that we cannot fully predict. But if we work to prepare our children to leave school confident, creative, full of ideas, and full of hope, they will help to invent that future and they will flourish in it.

Thank you.

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Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction in Wisconsin.

NOTE: A high-resolution photo of the state superintendent is available for download on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/vm-media.html>.